Communities across the nation are moving to make their roads safe for all users: bicyclists, pedestrians, transit riders, children, the elderly and those with mobility limitations. For too long, transportation priorities were focused on moving as many cars as quickly as possible into and out of communities. As a result, one-third of crashes result in injury or death to pedestrians or bicyclists. People want their roads to promote safety, health and economic vibrancy.

New Yorkers want the benefit of Complete Streets.

For several years, the New York Bicycling Coalition (NYBC) worked with legislators, allies and advocates to push forward a statewide Complete Streets bill. NYBC was heavily involved in obtaining unanimous passage of the law in 2011. The Law, recently signed by Governor Cuomo, will become effective in February 2012. NYBC is committed to ensuring that the Law achieves its goal to “accommodate and facilitate convenient access and mobility by all users, particularly pedestrians, bicyclists and individuals of all ages and abilities.” This fact sheet is the first in a series of guides and resources that NYBC is developing that will comprise the “NYBC Complete Streets Toolkit.” Visit us at www.nybc.net to learn more about this organization.


The Complete Street Law applies to many, but not all, road projects

The Law states that “Complete Street Designs [must be considered] for all state, county, and local transportation projects that are undertaken by the Department [of Transportation] or receive both federal and state funding and are subject to Department of Transportation oversight…”

Most projects that receive federal funding also receive state funding. The law is not applicable on many roads owned by villages, towns and counties. For this reason, local Complete Streets policies are still necessary because such policies help knit together a robust network of complete streets. The law does not apply retroactively to previously designed projects that have not yet been constructed.

The Complete Street Law addresses road design, construction, and rehabilitation

Resurfacing, maintenance or pavement recycling projects on otherwise eligible roads are not affected by the Law and need not include Complete Street design features.
The Complete Streets Law Lists a Partial Menu of Complete Streets Design Features
There are many possible design features that help to complete a street. The law lists a number of these, including, “sidewalks, paved shoulders suitable for use by bicyclists, lane striping, bicycle lanes, share the road signage, crosswalks, road diets, pedestrian control signalization, bus pull outs, curb cuts, raised crosswalks and ramps and traffic calming measures.” The list is not intended to be exhaustive and it will be important for officials and citizens to stay abreast of innovations. The law also implies that rural and urban projects will likely differ in the type and extent of complete street features that are installed. For example, in rural areas, shoulders of adequate width along roadsides may be an appropriate accommodation for bicyclists and pedestrians.

The Complete Streets Law Provides For “Exceptions”
Specific exemptions are provided to the application of the Complete Streets Law. It does not apply to: 1) roads where bicyclists and pedestrians are prohibited (e.g., most interstate highways), 2) when “the cost would be disproportionate to the need……or [there is] a demonstrated lack of need” and, 3) where installing Complete Streets design features would create a hazard

The Complete Streets Law Provides For Public Review
The law requires officials to provide a detailed, publicly available rationale when they propose to exclude complete streets features from an eligible project. Citizens have a newfound opportunity to ask hard questions. The Complete Streets Law requires officials to consider both current and projected demand, both of which are usually significantly under-counted. Citizens can bring to the forefront the documented fact that many people desire to bicycle or to walk but choose not to do so because of safety concerns. Statistics have proven that when bicycling and walking facilities are provided, people use them. Citizens should publicize the many benefits of complete streets – benefits to health, economy, transportation safety and equity, tourism and community improvement. With sustained citizen input, officials will be more likely to find that the costs of providing complete streets features are actually quite “proportionate.”

The Law Aims To Change Procedures In NYSDOT and Municipalities
The law requires the NYS Department of Transportation to document how it changes its planning, design and construction procedures to meet the law’s requirements. In a report to be issued within two years, the Department must document these changes as well as best practices in complete streets implementation within New York and beyond. The resulting report must include input from an array of stakeholders which will include advocacy groups such as NYBC. NYBC will urge NYSDOT to enhance policies & procedures such that state and local officials are empowered and encouraged to implement complete streets.

Well-Informed Advocacy is Crucial to the Success of The Law
The CS Law is limited in scope – it does not apply to many roads and to no bridges. It does, however, have the potential to materially improve safety on some of the most important, busiest, most dangerous roads. The law is an unambiguous directive to municipal and state officials that all travellers should be safely accommodated on our roads when practicable. Citizens should provide input early and often as officials choose which projects to fund and how they are designed and constructed. Remind officials about the requirement of the law and educate them about the needs of bicyclists, pedestrians and people with disabilities.